

*Seeks Accountability from Israel that \$2.8 billion in U.S. Taxpayer Aid Does Not Enable Settlement Expansion*

May 13, 2009

**Washington, DC** -Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) today questioned Mr. Jack Lew, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, regarding the Fiscal Year 2010 international affairs budget request during a hearing of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and released her statement. The statement below does not include Mr. Lew's response.

*Mr. Lew, first I'd like to congratulate the Administration on this budget request. I strongly support the "smart power" strategy described in your testimony. I look forward to working with the Administration on our shared priorities, including global health, climate change and agricultural development.*

*I was also encouraged to hear a strong statement from you in support of Middle East peace and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an urgent national security priority of the United States, but I have serious concerns about the new Israeli government's failure to embrace the creation of an independent Palestinian state.*

*This budget commits billions of taxpayer dollars to Israel and hundreds of millions to the Palestinians in pursuit of mutual peace and security. The American people are making a serious investment in peace.*

*However, U.S. support must be matched with accountability. It is time for both Palestinians and Israelis to be accountable for removing obstacles to peace.*

*One of those obstacles to peace and security is the Government of Israel's continued support for the expansion of settlements and the failure to prevent the establishment of illegal outposts on Palestinian land - land that must one day be included as part of a future Palestinian state.*

*Since 1967, homes have been built for 470,000 Israelis in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the past three years, Israel built over 5,000 homes in West Bank settlements and another 500 bids for housing were issued. Continued settlement expansion will only lead to one conclusion - a one state solution - and this is an unacceptable solution.*

*The continued expansion of settlements not only undermines the peace process, it undermines U.S. national security. In fact, settlement expansion also undermines Israel's security - and America's investments in Israeli security.*

*Last week, Vice-President Biden directly confronted the issue in a speech to AIPAC saying: "Israel has to work for a two-state solution ... not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts, and allow Palestinians freedom of movement."*

*I support the Vice-President's statement. And I would like to be totally clear on the Administration's position.*

*Does the U.S. government oppose the Israeli government's policy of settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem?*

*Can you assure me that none of the \$2.8 billion in funds provided to Israel through Foreign Military Financing will be used to enable or facilitate the expansion or maintenance of settlements?*

*Since settlement expansion is contrary to U.S. policy and undermines U.S. national security interests, what is our government going to do to hold our partner Israel accountable if they choose to continue their policy of settlement expansion?*

*I feel a sense of urgency in the push to peace. Time is not on our side. Every day settlement expansion continues, a two-state solution becomes farther out of reach.*

*Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees.*

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